

March 14, 2007

Testimony for Revised H.B. 7155:

A Professional Assistance Program for Health Care Professionals  
Patricia Holloran RN, Chair, Recovering Nurse Community of CT

The part of the Professional Assistance Program that I would like to address is the early recognition, intervention and facilitation into treatment for impaired professionals, and the education about how to recognize impairment in a colleague or themselves.

Every week, in our Nurses for Nurses meetings, nurses report that they knew very little, if anything, about addiction and could not even define recovery before they were facing their own. Education about addiction in general, and the particular characteristics about addiction within the health professions is sorely needed. It is the accepted norm within much of healthcare to treat addiction through the funnel of attitude. When it is one of our own, we usually judge and ignore; or when we do want to help, we don't know how; and more frightening, neither do many of our superiors or officials that we turn to for direction, or resolution. The most vulnerable time is when the Health Care worker is discovered to be impaired, and is confronted. This program will educate Health Care Professionals how to recognize and safely and correctly intervene to save the health, career, and life of one of our own, and by doing this, protecting the health care consumer in CT.

I recently came across a British study that reveals that over the last ten years the suicide rate for female nurses is four times higher than that of women in general—0.11 deaths per thousand in nurses as opposed to 0.03 deaths per thousand in women in general. Remember, 90% of all nurses are female.

Doctors are twice as likely to kill themselves compared with people working in other professions. The suicide rate for doctors over the past 10 years has been 0.135 deaths per 1,000, which is almost twice the national average. Overwork, stress and easy access to drugs are being blamed for high suicide rates within medicine.

"These shocking figures show that being a doctor or nurse carries a unique risk of suicide," the article states. "Doctors are working in an inherently stressful job. They work very long hours in difficult circumstances and the work itself is extremely taxing..." It is also the case that doctors have a reluctance to seek professional help and have a professional work ethic which means they feel they have to struggle on and keep working even when ill, sometimes with tragic results." We can apply this to all who work in healthcare. We can only wonder how much of the attitude and the perceived reactions of peers upon discovery of one addicted or mentally ill, contributes to the progression to dangerous or even fatal signs and symptoms.

This all just underscores the need to have the vehicle of the Professional Assistance Program for Healthcare Professionals to recognize and then intervene in a therapeutic, confidential and compassionate manner as a start to therapeutic, confidential, yet defined and firm monitoring of recovery and practice.

Very Truly Yours,

  
Patricia Holloran RN